



**Pathways For Change ;
Task Force On Resourcing the
Voluntary and Community Sector
in Northern Ireland**

a response

by NCH Northern Ireland

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Introduction

1. NCH is a major provider of services for children and families in need in Northern Ireland. Working in partnership with other agencies, we operate services in each of the four Health and Social Services Board areas (see Attachment 1 for more information about NCH).
2. We welcome the opportunity to respond to Pathways For Change - the Task Force On Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland report and do so by highlighting what we see as key issues under the general and specific headings below.

General Points

3. NCH believes that it is essential the Task Force acknowledge the concept and movement, in terms of delivering services to families and children in need, toward the notion of a *social care sector* in Northern Ireland. The term social care sector more accurately and better describes how a range of statutory agencies, voluntary organisations, community groups and private or independent organisations are engaged in identifying needs, planning and delivering services for families, young people and children - together with undertaking advocacy, policy and campaigning activities - within a mixed economy of (social) care.
4. The social care sector and what is understood to be the voluntary childcare sector is undergoing significant change. NCH believes it can be misleading to think of 'statutory' services as services delivered exclusively by statutory agencies (like health and social services Trusts). In a sense *all public services* have a statutory basis, albeit some specific services (such as child protection investigations) are required to be undertaken by specific agencies and under particular legal provisions or duties.
5. At a more general level, NCH shares in the voluntary childcare sector concerns that Pathways for Change seems to have primary concentrated on the needs of the community sector. As a result this may have led to a failure to recognise some of the examples of good practice in addressing children's needs which may have broader application across the voluntary and community sectors.
6. There are issues of significant impact on children for which the Department of Education NI is the lead department. The Taskforce Review needs to consider the developments arising from the Green Paper (Children At Risk) in England and current work of the DHSSPS on developing a Children in Need Strategy with particular attention on better assessing the impact of education and care issues.

Identifying Needs /Planning and Commissioning Services – partnership working

7. Increasingly 'public' services for children, young people and families in need are being identified, commissioned and delivered by cross-sector or inter-agency partnership arrangements and commissioned on the basis of service level agreements or under other forms of contractual arrangements. *The Taskforce should undertake more work on needs identification and* NCH would point to Children Service Planning (CSP) processes as an excellent model of good practice in this respect.
9. The CSP strengths lie in the way it is needs led, inter-agency in orientation, local, systematic and helps to establish agreed priorities for action. NCH has invested considerable human and material resources in CSP processes in order to work with others involved in the social care sector with the common aim of meeting the needs of families, children and young people in need.
10. For NCH, this investment brings a commitment to providing high quality, professional advice and support services, based on safer care principles and considerations, a strong commitment to children's rights, supporting families and user participation in developing effective policies, procedures and models of practice to underpin high quality services. We believe these principles and commitments should be reflected in and underpin key themes in Pathways to Change (Funding, Accountability, Partnerships and Infrastructure) and Workforce Planning Issues - see below.

Funding, Resources and Workforce Planning Issues

11. We wonder why the DHSSPS and the voluntary childcare sector are not represented on the Task Force? Their involvement would help reflect concerns of the sector in relation to the wide range of funding systems operating in the sector and how well these are understood. We would suggest the Northern Ireland Office, Health and Social Services Boards / Trusts also need to be properly involved in the review of systems of funding.
12. NCH is very committed to developing the potential of its human resources and supporting its workforce – a commitment made difficult in the current climate of short term project funding. We are surprised *workforce issues* is not a specific theme in its own right in Pathways For Change - particularly since workforce agenda issues have become significant in driving social care agendas in other regions. We would suggest *Workforce Issues* together with *Information Communication Technology* needs should be thoroughly investigated and developed as a discrete themes by an expanded Task Force team.
13. NCH concurs with CiNI in highlighting the following resource issues:
 - The increasing disparity in salaries between the voluntary and statutory sector social care staff

- the lack of sustainability which impacts on the ability to attract and retain quality staff and adequately reward high quality of work of individuals involved in the sector
- programmes that are effectively working and delivering have to be closed because of a 'drying-up' of funds
- excessive time and effort is involved in monitoring and evaluation of projects against a range of disparate standards / criteria
- the accountability levels associated with receiving funds vastly outstrip those imposed on the public sector
- partnerships can be imbalanced with power frequently residing with the statutory /commissioning partner
- a limited amount of meaningful joined-up working delivering for the specific needs of children and families
- funding bodies or intermediaries can be reluctant to take risks - projects are too short-term focussed - evaluation often concentrates on outcomes that are easy to measure, rather than the longer-term assessment of how specific interventions or processes have developed children and encouraged growth.
- Recognition is needed that there are many wider societal benefits from the range of projects underway, which by definition are not always immediately identifiable.

Public Policy Work - Advocacy

14. As with CiNI, NCH believes there is a strong need for constant lobbying and advocacy to change peoples' attitudes and build capacity to enable them to participate adequately. The 4 Nations Child Policy Network is an example good practice and an effective enabling tool to facilitate capacity building for effective advocacy and lobbying. It is a central information service spanning the voluntary, statutory and private sectors, enabling information exchange and empowering users to engage in key policy debates – and an important part of 21st Century *ICT infrastructure required for the sector.*
15. NCH believes that it is crucial to have a critical dialogue to help challenge the status quo. Where appropriate, advocacy must be supported as a 'core' activity in its own right and be assigned funding accordingly. This is particularly important in specialist areas such as the needs of children and young people.

Conclusion

16. We welcome the opportunity to respond to this important consultation. NCH is committed to developing and delivering quality services for children, young people and families in need in Northern Ireland. We would like to see the Taskforce debate about sustaining the voluntary and community sector move on to acknowledging the significant contribution NCH and other professional childcare organisations make to the social care sector in Northern Ireland.

17. The debate needs to consider how the safe, social care needs of children, young people and families can be best identified and met through organisations and agencies working together – at all levels from government departments to local communities - with each bringing their own expertise, experience, perspective and resources. The debate must mature in line with the evolution and increasingly more professional approach of the sector itself and address workforce planning issues alongside good models of practice.
18. Accountability, monitoring and evaluation need to be much more in keeping with the level of resources 'going in', services being provided and more sensitive to the nature of needs and issues being addressed - without compromising safer care issues. While benchmarking and evaluating quality standards is an important project it also raises 'equity of access' and 'equality of outcome' issues in the process of getting there – the playing field is far from even.
19. Public policy work and advocacy have a central role to play in helping voice user / community needs and concerns and ensuring these are reflected and addressed in child and family policy and practice developments and the dialogue around such issues.

Attachment 1 : NCH Northern Ireland

Background

NCH is one of the leading voluntary childcare organisations in the U.K. The charity was established in 1869 as a response to the plight of abandoned children living on the streets. It was founded by the Rev. Dr Thomas Bowman Stephenson and still has its roots in the Methodist Church. It is committed to improving the lives of the most needy children and campaigning to end child poverty and child abuse.

Service Provision

NCH runs more than 500 projects for vulnerable children, young people and their families and in doing so support over 100,000 people (figures as of April 2003). Services are provided for some of the most vulnerable and excluded children and young people in the U.K. The range of services include:

- Family Centres
- Community Centres
- Disability Projects
- Leaving Care and Homelessness Projects
- Community based Projects
- Sexual Abuse Treatment Centres
- Counselling and Mediation Services
- Residential Homes and Schools
- Homefinding Services
- Young Carers Projects
- Research, Development and Support Projects

How NCH works

The vast majority of NCH projects are run in partnership with public bodies, local authorities, Health Authorities and Trusts, Housing Associations, Community groups and other voluntary organisations.

As well as being a service-provider itself, NCH often acts as the “honest broker” and “umbrella manager” in enabling better co-ordination of services provided by different agencies.

Our work is founded on four principles:

- A commitment to providing high quality services in the most needy areas;
- Respect for the families and children with whom we work;
- A willingness to work closely and co-operatively with our partners in developing services most relevant to the area;
- To provide services that are good value for money.

NCH Northern Ireland

Background

NCH has had a presence in Northern Ireland since July 2000. The first projects became operational in 2002. There are currently 4 operational projects with the fifth about to have its official opening in the second week of March 2004. NCH Northern Ireland now has a Senior Management Team which consists of the Director, Graham Illingworth (based in Cardiff), Dawn Shaw Deputy Director (based in Belfast), Carina Boyle Assistant Director (based in 'Derry), Dr Theresa Donaldson (based in Belfast) and Ross McCrea Public Policy Officer (based in Belfast). The Team has administrative support in Belfast and Derry and H.R, Finance, IT and Surveyor functions which are supported from Cardiff. There are around 50 staff employed in Northern Ireland.

Current Developments within Northern Ireland

Larne Parental Support Project

The project was developed through the Northern Area Children's Services Planning process by the Larne Locality pilot. It is a partnership project with the Northern Board, Homefirst Trust and NCH Northern Ireland. NCH Northern Ireland in conjunction with the Larne Locality Steering group and the Northern Health and Social Services Board secured Executive Programme Funds for a Parental Support project in Larne.

The project targets children aged 0 – 4 years old. The multidisciplinary team of a Health Visitor, Speech and Language Therapist and Family Support Social Worker provides a range of family support activities in three specific wards in Larne. This project became operational in April 2002.

Lismore Family Project

NCH Northern Ireland in partnership with the Western Health and Social Services Board, Sperrin Lakeland and Foyle Health and Social Services Trusts secured Executive Programme Funds for the development of a Residential Family Assessment Centre. The Centre provides accommodation for 3 – 4 families and provides a service to the Western Board Area. This is situated in Sion Mills and became operational in May 2002.

Ballymote Family Project

A Family Support service linked to the Downpatrick Sure Start project and supported by Down Lisburn Trust which became operational in November 2002. This project provides a range of early years and family support for children aged under 4 years.

Armagh & Dungannon Young Carers

This Project has been developed through the Children's Services Planning process in the Southern Area. NCH will manage the project on behalf of the planning partners. The aim of this project is to provide support to young carers in the Armagh & Dungannon Trust area. The Young Carer's co-ordinator came into post in early June 2003.

Clooney Family Centre

NCH has been successful in securing funding from the Executive Programme Funds Children's Fund to develop a Family Resource Centre in the Waterside area of Derry. This has been developed through a partnership with Clooney Hall Methodist Mission in Derry, The Resource Centre Derry (based in Shantallow) and Foyle Health and Social Services Trust. The recruitment process for the staff has been completed and the official opening was held in the second week of March 2004.

Principles for Service development

Any new service developments will be based on the following principles;

- The opportunity to work in partnership
- Providing services in agreed areas of need
- Services in which NCH has acknowledged expertise

Training Activities

NCH Northern Ireland has also provided Training for in excess of 250 people, from a wide range of professions on "Handling Children's Behaviour", "Building Self Esteem" and "Handling Teenage Behaviour". This has formed the basis of parenting groups throughout Northern Ireland.

Influencing Activity

NCH is represented on a number of focus groups & committees throughout Northern Ireland, including

- The Northern Area Children and Young People's Committee
- The Board of Directors for Child Care (N.I)
- Policy Subgroup – Child Care Northern Ireland
- Northern Health & Social Services Board Children's Services Planning Subgroup – Children experiencing severe Psychiatric, Psychological, Emotional or Behavioural difficulties (Chair)
- Northern Health & Social Services Board – CAMHS Implementation Group
- Larne Locality Steering Group
- Lismore Family Project Management Group
- Downpatrick Sure Start Committee
- Downpatrick Sure Start Finance Sub Committee
- Ballymote Management Centre Committee
- Family Support Strategy Group – WHSSB
- Foyle Health & Social Services Trust Family Support Panel
- Foyle Health & Social Services Trust Child Protection Panel
- Promoting Quality Standards in Child Care Organisations – Western Area Child Protection Committee
- Southern Area children's Services Planning Working group for Children who are Carers
- NCH Northern Ireland are members of Child Care Northern Ireland (CCNI); The Association of Chief Officers of Voluntary Organisations (ACOVO); and Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA).

Benefits for those working in partnership with NCH

NCH has a national reputation for high quality services. They provide management and supervision to the Projects and all support and administrative functions (Training, Finance Management, Human Resources Management and Design and Maintenance of Buildings).

This is provided through the Wales Office, where key personnel have dedicated time in their respective functions to support the developments in Northern Ireland. This system is well established and works well. Electronic network links to the National organisation have also been established enabling access to the whole national NCH infrastructure.

NCH contributes to the management costs of all the projects in which it is involved. Partnership arrangements are developed through negotiations with partner organisations, for some projects contributions for capital costs may also be made.

NCH can contribute to local planning and decision making fora (Adoption Panel, Area Child Protection Committee, Children's Services Planning Groups etc) and can act as an independent investigator in complaints procedures.

NCH has considerable experience in Sure Start projects in both England and Wales, as well as the range of services listed previously. There is a large infrastructure of knowledge, expertise and skills, which can be accessed through NCH's involvement in projects and partnerships.

Further Developments

- NCH will actively engage in dialogue with the key players in Northern Ireland to explore potential opportunities to develop needs-led services in the areas in which we have acknowledged expertise;
- Where specific areas are identified for new developments, NCH will negotiate partnership agreements and utilising our expertise and organisational support will create high quality services which are sensitive to the Northern Ireland context;
- NCH want to participate and contribute to local relevant decision-making and planning for and will continue to seek representation on them.

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